

Strategic Plan: Building a Skilled and Stable Out-of-School Time Workforce

An investment in staff is an investment in children and youth

Introduction

The presence of a skilled and stable workforce in out-of-school time programs for children and youth plays a significant role in the quality and continuity of these programs and consequently, the impact they have on young people. Yet the past two decades have consistently revealed many obstacles to the cultivation of such a workforce. The absence of national or statewide professional development systems is an obvious impediment; without a registry of practitioners, core competencies or centralized funding, it difficult to design, offer, and fund training or professional development programs for staff. Staff whom do increase their knowledge base by attending training or working toward a credential or degree are rarely compensated for their efforts. Turnover appears to result from the lack of adequate compensation and options for upward mobility within the field.

Interviews with state and local leaders have provided some evidence of progress in several states and cities towards building components of a professional development system, curbing turnover, increasing compensation and providing incentives for staff. However, there is little indication that the field as a whole is benefiting from these isolated efforts –most of which rely heavily on state and federal funding and are subject to the tides of budget cuts.

These are systemic issues that have troubled the field for decades. This strategic plan sets forth three clear recommendations for systemic change that we think are necessary steps towards building a field in which people choose to work and choose to stay. We believe that implementation of these recommendations will require collaboration and new partnerships across multiple national and statewide agencies as well as the traditional fields of youth work and school age care.

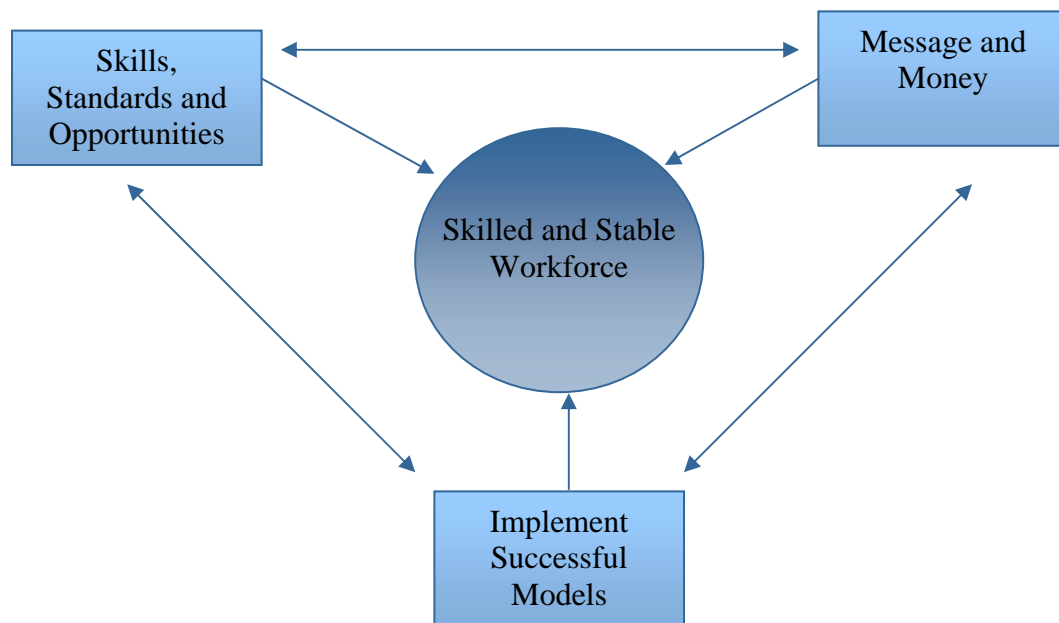
NIOST and the Center have defined the out-of-school time workforce as individuals employed as frontline workers and supervisory staff in an of-school time program that is engaged in promoting the overall development of school aged children and youth ages 6-18. After school programs and youth centers are examples of such programs.

Recommendations

The following three recommendations emerged from a year-long process of investigations and conversations with members of a national advisory committee (see page 6 for list of participants).¹

1. **Standards, Skills and Opportunities:**
Determine a national set of standards for out-of-school time workers, create training and career development opportunities and a set of compensation benchmarks.
2. **Message and Money:**
Unite stakeholders at local, state and national levels to advocate for the resources necessary to support high quality programs and a skilled and stable workforce.
3. **Implement Successful Models:**
Build on and replicate successful models like the US Military Child and Youth Care System.

Pursued simultaneously, these recommendations will help move us towards building a skilled and stable workforce and a more cohesive field



¹ The three recommendations outlined above were distilled from the main points of agreement among members of the Advisory Committee. Unresolved points of tension and debate on such issues as agreement on nomenclature; the role of formal education and staff turnover were discussed briefly during the Advisory Committee meetings but ultimately set aside from the process of developing recommendations in an effort to move ahead.

Action Steps:

Standards, Skills and Opportunities:

A clear set of standards for the skills needed by out-of-school time workers at different levels of responsibility, a well-articulated map for career advancement, and benchmarks for increasing compensation as skills and responsibilities increase, are critical elements of attracting and retaining the workers who can deliver quality programs for children and youth.

1. Determination of a nationally recognized and endorsed set of standards
 - Define skills needed by workers at different levels of responsibility
 - Set compensation benchmarks as workers skills progress

Potential Initiators and collaborators: Association for Child and Youth Care Practice, Center for the Child Care Workforce, Council for Professional Recognition, National Collaboration for Youth, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National School-Age Care Alliance, National Training Institute for Community Youth Work and the US Department of Education.

2. Conduct national research to determine who is entering the workforce and why they leave.
 - Use findings to develop appropriate training, education and retention programs

Potential Initiators and collaborators: National Institute on Out-of-School Time, US Department of Labor, US Department of Education, other research and funding partners

3. Build an information clearinghouse to facilitate the sharing of best practices, existing core competencies and credentials, career development and compensation initiatives and demographic data on the workforce.

Potential Initiators and collaborators: AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National Collaboration for Youth, National Training Institute, New England Workforce Partners and US Military Child, Youth and Families

Message and Money:

It will take political will and a commitment of substantial public resources on the local, state and national levels to support and sustain a skilled and stable out-of-school workforce. The effort to build that will and secure those resources is an essential component of any effort to move the field forward.

1. National actors, including the National School Age Care Alliance and the Afterschool Alliance must continue to take an active role in organizing stakeholder coalitions in each state and to advocate for funding and pursue policy agendas at the national level.
 - Develop and make educational and lobbying materials available to state coalitions. Partner with NSACA state affiliates like the Massachusetts School-Age Coalition which has developed a strong policy and advocacy arm.

2. Workforce development strategies must become part of the fabric of city and statewide out-of-school time initiatives.
3. Determine the “true cost” of operating high quality out-of-school time programs factoring in the cost of staff development and compensation.
4. Publicize the link between high quality staff and high quality programs.

Potential Initiators and collaborators: Achieve Boston, Afterschool Alliance, AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Members of the Cross-Cities Network for Leaders of Large Scale Citywide Initiatives, National School Age Care Alliance and its state affiliates, Midwest BEST, Mott’s Statewide Afterschool Network, National Collaboration for Youth, National Women’s Law Center, the Service Employees International Union and allied funding agencies.

Implement Successful Models:

While we have a long way to go in creating a skilled and stable workforce across the country to work with children and youth in the after-school hours, there have been many successful efforts around the country to create the infrastructure to support high-quality out-of-school programs. One strikingly successful example is the U.S. Military Child and Youth Care System, which provides out-of-school care for 200,000 children, from birth to age 18, around the globe. This system is characterized by a clear set of standards for staff training and skills, as well as opportunities for career advancement linked to increased compensation.

1. Pilot and evaluate a five-city project to test the US Military Child and Youth Care System model in a civilian context and adapt other successful workforce development models in the context of existing citywide out-of-school time initiatives.

Potential Initiators and collaborators: Members of the Cross-Cities Network for Leaders of Large Scale Citywide Initiatives, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National League of Cities and the National Women’s Law Center.

Conclusion

Leadership is the key to halting the revolving door of turnover, guaranteeing staff a living wage and making working with children and youth during non-school hours an attractive career option. Despite isolated gains across the county, the workforce crisis will not resolve itself. Leaders from national, state and local agencies, both public and private, must make building a skilled and stable workforce a priority before measurable gains will be made.

Project History

This strategic plan is the culmination of two years of targeted research, discussion and investigation by NIOST and the Center in partnership with a national Advisory Committee. NIOST and the Center began the Building a Skilled and Stable Workforce project in January 2001 by identifying key individuals such as economists, policy-makers, leaders in the out-of-school time field, advocates and funding agencies from across the country to join an Advisory Committee to help inform and guide the development of the plan. The goal in choosing members for the committee was to have representation from a broad diversity of fields and sectors that would give the plan a thorough treatment of differing perspectives. This plan has become illustrative of broad-based thinking from individuals who understand the complexity of tackling this issue.

NIOST conducted an extensive literature review in order to gauge what data collection, workforce improvement models, public policy and advocacy efforts were already underway. In July 2001, NIOST and the Center co-hosted a National Youth Policy Forum, where the need for a “coherent national approach” to address the wage and professional development needs of school age and youth workers was unanimously endorsed. The Advisory Committee met again in April and October of 2002 and participants concluded that in order to effectively address the challenges within the out-of-school field, national, state and local strategies must be implemented.

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